

New Fiction

Continued from Preceding Page.

him. He doesn't drop him immediately, however. There are other quotations from the book first, and more comment upon these. Moreover, there is something said about Sherwood Anderson in the last few pages of this article that is worth every word of O'Brien's about art in the short story, and which it would profit Anderson to cut out and paste in some spot where he could look upon it frequently.

There are mighty few of the pet vices of our age that don't get a rap over the knuckles in this clear sighted and alert little book. Humorous raps, certainly, but smartly delivered. From the first, where the Red Man and the Puritan are contrasted, and where we are shown that a great plan was irretrievably thwarted, on through such matters as "Money and Fireflies" with its delightfully contrasted anecdotes of Prof. Hagen and Cissie Loftus, or the discussion of trousers' creases, or an old fashioned Heaven, there is laughter, and plenty of it, but there is an amazing lot of horse sense, too. Mr. Herford sticks his finger into the ribs of a sham, a pose, an affectation, and giggles that finger playfully but firmly. The thing so poked may not break into a chuckle, but the onlooker does.

HILDEGARDE HAWTHORNE.

SWALLOWED UP. By Mrs. Wilson Woodrow. Brentano's.

THE opening chapters of this, being modeled very closely upon the facts of a well remembered tragedy—the disappearance of a young woman of a wealthy family, who vanished from Fifth avenue in broad daylight after a visit to a book store and was never heard of again—the emotionally potent, since the actual happening gives them reality. The girl of the story, Hope Ranger, follows the girl of fact up to the vanishing point, but thereafter the tale becomes merely a very good yarn of moving picture adventure and the characters turn into movie actors; but highly capable ones. The missing Hope is found incarcerated in a private lunatic asylum; held for ransom by our great and good old friend, the Crime Syndicate,

which is in this case called the "Com-bine" and consists of one old super-crook, a doctor, and a very wicked woman who functions as a trained nurse. The story moves rapidly, through the usual strenu-ousities, to a whirlwind finish, culminating in an auto race up Fifth avenue at sixty miles an hour.

There is a touch of variety in the introduction of "Juarez Charlie," a gentleman hobo and old friend of the girl's father. He is well done, with some individuality. It might be complained that when Hope and the rescuing hero, George, make their first break from the asylum there was really no reason why they should not have driven quietly on to her home—no reason except that to make a longer story the girl had to be recaptured. But one can easily forgive eccentricities on the part of a hero and heroine of that family. Another bit of novelty is that the only real knockdown fight in the story is that between the heroine and the naughty nurse, Anita. Anita has just accidentally killed the doctor-conspirator, and she and Hope and the corpse are locked into a room. The fight lasts several rounds before Anita takes the count, so that Hope can kick the corpse out of the way, borrow Anita's keys and escape. Perhaps the pugilist heroine is "coming in."

The usual properties are all there; including the old house with a secret chamber, but when Hope and George are shut up there, while the conspirators hunt them, and at once begin to make violent love, for the first time, the reader is apt to exclaim, "But this is so sudden!" As to that, the actors in such a yarn must be sudden people. These are.

OVERLOOKED. By Maurice Baring. Houghton Mifflin Company.

THE reader of this has the unusual opportunity of hearing the same story told twice; first in the form of a partial record of observed facts, and then in the shape of a novelette evolved from those facts by a novelist who is also a character in the whole story. And finally there is a third section, giving the hitherto missing key fact, and rounding out the complete narrative. It is an extremely clever performance, greatly interesting to the analytical reader. And it has a delicate vein of satire running through it, aimed chiefly at the psychological novelist, Rudd, of the story, who figures as a rather pretentious ass. He is sometimes accurate in his observation, but usually quite wrong in his interpretation of the various characters. Indeed, Mr. Baring's chief purpose seems to have been to have fun with the "know-it-all" type of writer. It makes an entertaining book, but it remains chiefly a "stunt."

The plot, or, rather, the situation is of the simplest. There is discussion among a group of sojourners at a French health resort as to why the very attractive Miss Brandon has never married. It appears that many years before she had been engaged to a young man, who, however, was too poor to marry. Also her irascible old father needed her, so the engagement was broken. The question becomes: does she still love him, or has she ever loved him; and, if he were to come back, would she marry him? Then there appears a mysterious Russian, and he and Miss Brandon apparently fall in love. There is even an engagement, which, however, is suddenly broken and the Russian departs. Meanwhile the novelist, Rudd, is studying this situation, thinking to make a novel of it. A parallel record is being kept by a blind man, who acts as a sort of chorus to explain things. Rudd does make a novel of his observations, and the game is to show how wrong he is in his guesses. It is well played: a deft handling of a difficult theme.

TO THE DARK TOWER. By Mark Cross. P. J. Kennedy & Sons.

ONE is not apt to think of an author who can write "S. J." after his name as a likely maker of high colored adventure stories, which seem rather outside the clerical *metier*. But this is really what Roosevelt used to call a "bully good story"; it is far above the average of its type in its movement and life, and it is strenuous enough to suit the most rabid taste. The author has studied "Treasure Island" to good purpose—a frankly acknowledged debt. His conception of the characters, especially of his boy hero and of the various heavy villains, might almost be called Stevensonian, and his style (with some lapses) is excellent: simple, clear and forceful. And he has a good

narrative faculty; the thing moves. If, as one suspects, his purpose was partly to provide good, clean fiction of excitement for Catholic readers in place of the dubiously moral output, he has succeeded notably, for it is a very readable yarn.

It details the hectic adventures of a very young man who sets out in quest of a wealthy uncle from whom he hopes to get a start in life. The uncle turns out to be a very bad lot, and Gerard tumbles into the middle of a complex of intrigue and fighting, involving a buried treasure, in an old house on the bank of the Mississippi, in Iowa, and also a competition for the hand of the uncle's lovely daughter. Gerard is, in truth, something of a "Jim Hawkins" and all the familiar situations of such a tale are expertly managed. The author has used nearly all of them, including the fight on the edge of a precipice, a mysterious cave, and other things too numerous to mention. A good thriller.

NO HANDICAP. By Marion A. Taggart. Benziger Brothers.

MISS TAGGART has two definite sets of pieces in playing the game of this novel: one set being extremely well done, carefully carved and finished, lifelike figures, the other mere bits of unpainted wood. But, somehow, one does not resent it, for the unfinished characters are so obviously lay figures, inserted for a purpose, for the book is, measurably, a propaganda story. All the naughty folk are Protestants; but not all Protestants are necessarily naughty. There is not a bit of venom in it all, and it is really propaganda for abstract goodness and the fine things of life in general rather than narrowly for the Church. It is wholesome, and interesting reading for any one, Protestant or Catholic. Indeed, such a figure as that of old Father Coigne is always welcome; he is altogether lovable and human—the canny, experienced, truly fatherly priest. If the young Irish hero is a hero and saint he is not unbelievable. The main plot is that of the rivalry of two friends for the same girl, but the handling is not cheaply conventional. Miss Taggart has humor, and delicacy, as well as depth of feeling, and her manner is good. The book holds the interest, and in spite of its obvious faults is very well worth while.

VALIANT DUST. By Katharine Fullerton Gerould. Charles Scribner's Sons.

MRS. GEROULD shows at her spectacular best in the stories of this collection; especially in the opening number, "An Honest Man," which is the account of the tragic disillusionment of a "parlor Bolshevik." The theme is here perfectly adapted to the author's unusual power, and her habit of emphasizing the "gesture," of making almost a ritual performance of the attitudes of her people, suits the subject matter. "Heaven and hell," says Mrs. Gerould, "shall have become less than names when the irony of fate ceases to be perceived by human nature." And of all our modern story writers Mrs. Gerould is the most perceptive of such ironies. She has other fine,

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